Housework or sleep? Study says it depends when you were born

January 30 2022, by Mike Schneider

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

When Gen Xer Amy Rottier went shopping for her young children two decades ago, she drove to a mall and browsed for what she needed. Her millennial daughter, Helen, who is studying for a doctorate and doesn't have children, buys anything she needs with a click on her iPad.

The women, ages 50 and 25, respectively, illustrate the pace of change from one generation to the next in what people do in an average day. The changes were revealed in a study released last week by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Generation X women were more likely to do housework, care for children, read for pleasure and do lawn work, the study found. Millennial women were more inclined to exercise, spend leisure time on computers, take care of their pets and sleep.

The report uses American Time Use Survey data to capture how people lived at a point in time between the ages of 23 and 38. For Amy Rottier's generation, that was in 2003. For her daughter Helen, it was in 2019—a year before the global coronavirus pandemic dramatically altered patterns of living. The report reflects changes for men as well as women.

Both generations spent the same amount of time working, and men worked longer hours than women because women were more likely to work part time. The two generations spent about the same time on leisure and sports activities, but Gen Xers were more likely than millennials to have children and own homes.

Even though viewing television was the top leisure activity for both generations, millennial men spent 18 minutes a day less watching TV than their Gen X counterparts. They appear to have shifted that time into playing games. On an average day, more millennials were participating in sports, recreation and exercise than their Gen X peers.

Changes in technology weighed heavily in people's choices, according to the report. Social media was in its infancy in 2003, smartphones weren't widespread and Cyber Monday hadn't yet been invented by retail marketing gurus.

"Millennials have an advantage in that they were able to do a lot of things from the comfort of their home, without getting in their car and going to a store or bank. It saves on time. For Generation X, that wasn't available when they were their age," said Michelle Freeman, the senior economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics who wrote the report. "You can't ignore the technological improvements from 2003 to 2019, and that is definitely a factor."

Decisions about having children figured in, too.

"Taking care of kids, that was what I was doing the majority of my free time," said Amy Rottier, who has five children with her husband, Eric, in Madison, Wisconsin. "For me, at that point, leisure time was my husband telling me to take a bath and he would wrangle the kids and put them to bed."

As someone in her mid-20s now, Helen Rottier, who lives in Chicago, said the idea of having children is a distant proposition.

"I'm still working on my degree, and then I want to get settled into my career," she said. "With my friends, we are now at the same age our parents were when we were born, and we aren't thinking of having kids yet."

Millennials were more likely to delay having families compared with members of Generation X, who were born between 1965 and 1980. Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, were more likely to have advanced degrees and less likely to be married than Gen Xers.

Gen Xers spent more time shopping for goods, which is likely because the act of physically going to a brick-and-mortar store took more time than shopping online. Millennial women spent less time per day reading for pleasure compared with Generation X women. Freeman said reading

has declined for all age groups in the past two decades, going from 22 minutes a day on average in 2003 to 16 minutes a day in 2019.

Millennials also slept 22 minutes per day longer than their Gen X counterparts, which Freeman said may reflect shifting attitudes about the importance of sleep.

"My parents are baby boomers and they worked a lot," she said. "Sleeping a lot was considered lazy. We now respect the fact that more sleep is good for our health."

Without having children like their Gen X peers, millennials spent nearly twice as much time doing animal and pet care activities on a given day than Gen Xers did in 2003, according to the report. Then there's the difference on time spent gardening or keeping up a yard, which millennials spent about a half hour a day doing less, primarily because they were less likely to own a home.

"I don't know if I will ever have a house with a lawn," Helen Rottier said. "It may be different in the future, but right now, I don't see any appeal in a lawn. Why would I need to take care of a lawn?"

Citation: Housework or sleep? Study says it depends when you were born (2022, January 30) retrieved 25 June 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2022-01-housework-born.html